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PRRC emerging trends

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Public's Views Have Changed Greatly Over Last 50 Years

PRINCETON, N.J. – Dramatic changes in the attitudes and behavior of Americans have occurred in the half-century since the Gallup Poll published its first report in sponsoring newspapers on October 20, 1935.

Some of the most profound changes during Gallup's 50 years of scientific polling include the following:

1. **The growth of tolerance toward persons of different races, religions, and other background characteristics.** The proportions who say they would vote for a black, a Jew, or a Catholic for president, for example, have grown dramatically since the 1930's. So too, has the expressed willingness to vote for a woman: in 1937 only 31% said they would vote for a woman for president; today 78% would do so. Surveys also show a marked increase in the acceptance of interracial and interfaith marriages.

2. **The "sexual revolution."** In 1969, 68% of U.S. adults said premarital sex is wrong; now only 39% hold this view.

3. **Huge increases in the cost of living.** In 1937 the public felt a family of four needed $30 per week to make ends meet. The figure today is 10 times as high – $300. Public estimates of food expenditures have soared from $11 per week in 1937 to $75 today.

4. **A sharp decline in the appeal of large families.** In 1936, 34% of Americans thought the ideal family should include four children. This percentage increased to 47% in 1947 but subsequently has dropped to today's 11%. This question has proved to be an accurate barometer of actual population trends.

5. **Changing health habits.** The percentage of Americans who exercise daily has soared from 24% in 1961 to 59% in the latest survey. Active participation in sports has also grown substantially.

But this encouraging trend is offset by other Gallup findings: The proportion who admit to occasional overindulgence in alcohol has almost doubled – from 18% in 1974 to 32% in 1985. And despite warnings about the relationship between smoking and lung cancer and heart disease, little decline is noted in cigarette smoking. Although the use of marijuana is down, cocaine use is growing.

6. **Growth in the fear of crime.** Thirty years ago, crime did not figure among the top community problems named by Americans. Now, it is foremost in communities of all sizes. In 1965, one-third (34%) were fearful of venturing out of their homes after dark; currently 45% say they are afraid to do so.

7. **The decline in support for labor unions.** Although the decline has levelled out in 1985, the 58% who currently approve of trade unionism is far lower than in 1936 (72%) and even lower than in 1957 (76%). Key factors in labor's declining support: negative feelings about some labor union leaders and strikes by public employees.

8. **A continuing conviction that the U.S. ought to work closely with other nations at many levels, but a strong reluctance, stemming from the Vietnam experience, to commit U.S. troops to involvement in the affairs of other nations.**

9. **A period of lessened confidence and trust in the key institutions of the U.S. society.** Confidence in these institutions – Congress, the Supreme Court, public schools, the media, and the like – is only marginally higher than in the immediate post-Watergate days.

10. **Great changes in manners and morals.** A poll in 1939 showed that a majority of adults thought it was indecent for women to wear shorts for street wear. In the 1940's the Gallup Poll asked the public about such things as "Do you object to women drinking in public places?" or "Should school teachers be allowed to smoke outside the classroom?" In 1950, the Gallup Poll asked "Do you object to a woman saying 'hell' or 'damn' in public?"

But Unchanged in Some Key Ways

Despite certain dramatic changes in public opinion over the last 50 years, in other respects the nation has changed little since the mid-30s, as discovered in Gallup Polls:

1. The problems named today as the "most important facing the nation" closely parallel those named in the 1930's – unemployment, international tensions, the high cost of living, and government spending. Almost invariably – except during wartime or periods of threat of war

Continued on page 2

– concern over the twin economic ills of unemployment and inflation have dominated the concerns of the American people.

2. The standard of living of Americans has increased dramatically over the last 50 years, yet the nation remains plagued by poverty. A recent Gallup survey showed one-fourth of the total sample (and nearly half of non-whites) saying there were times during the previous 12 months when they did not have enough money to buy the food, clothing, or medical supplies they needed.

3. Although the nation has shifted to a somewhat more liberal position on a number of key issues over the last half-century, the populace continues to include about equal numbers of persons describing themselves as liberals and conservatives.

4. Americans continue to place a high premium on such traditional values as hard work, the family, and religion. The ideal lifestyle, in the view of the large majority of U.S. women, continues to be marriage with children. Of late, that ideal has come to include a full- or part-time job outside the home.

5. Basic religious beliefs, – in God, an afterlife, etc. – have remained intact, although a decline is noted in the proportion who say religion is very important in their lives.

6. Finally, despite the multitude of problems confronting society, Americans continue to be optimistic about the future of the nation. They are optimistic for three basic reasons: (1) We have survived difficult periods in our past; (2) we have shown that we have the capability to change; and (3) there is much that the individual can do to bring about change in his or her community and in society as a whole. In fact, volunteerism, an American trait, remains at a high level.

An examination of the views of the millions of Americans who have been interviewed by the Gallup Poll over the last half-century leads to these important conclusions: (1) The collective judgment of the American people has proved to be sound; (2) the public is willing to make great sacrifices for the national good in times of crisis; and (3) the will of the people sooner or later becomes law.

In the case of many legislative issues and proposals, the late George Gallup, Sr. believed, the people are often years ahead of their legislative leaders. He said: "Through nearly five decades of polling, we have found the collective judgment of the people to be extraordinarily sound, especially on issues which come within the scope of the typical person's experience. Often the people are actually ahead of their elected leaders in accepting innovations and radical changes."

Founded in 1935, the Gallup Poll was the first organization to provide newspaper readers with public opinion polling reports based on scientific survey procedures.

The Gallup Organization (1958) and its corporate predecessors, Public Opinion Surveys (1938) and Audience Research Institutes (1937), were established to serve the needs of business, government, and others who wished to apply survey research to problem solving.

The Gallup Organization is a member of Gallup International Research Institutes, founded in 1947, and is affiliated with survey organizations in 39 nations around the globe.

Election surveys both here and abroad are a good indicator of a survey organization's technical proficiency. Evidence that progress has been made is seen in the fact that for the period 1936 through 1950, the average deviation of U.S. Gallup survey results from the actual election results was 3.6 percentage points, from 1952 through 1960 it was 1.7 percentage points, from 1962 through 1970, 1.6 points, and from 1972 through 1984 it was 1.2 percentage points. The vote for the candidates in the 1984 presidential election exactly matched the final Gallup pre-election survey results, making this forecast the most accurate in the long history of the Gallup Poll.

'Religion In America, 1985' Report

Here are four important reasons why these annual reports on religion in America have proved so popular:

1. They are an invaluable source of information on religious beliefs and practices in the U.S. and abroad, much of which is unavailable elsewhere.

2. They provide national and regional norms against which the clergy can match their own churches and synagogues in terms of religious belief, practice, knowledge and stewardship.

3. They provide new and exciting information that can be developed into sermons or articles on the state of religion.

4. They provide data indispensable for future planning: What are the new religious interests of church members and non-members? Where does the public think churches are falling short?

HOW TO ORDER

RELIGION IN AMERICA, 1985 can be ordered from The Gallup Organization, Inc. P.O. Box 310, Princeton, New Jersey 08542. The cost of the 1985 report is $25.00.

Public Closely Divided over Federal Aid to Parochial Schools

Proponents of government aid to parochial schools – whether through a constitutional amendment or by means of the "voucher system" – are having a tough time winning public opinion to their side.

The latest Gallup Poll finds 45% in favor and 47% opposed to a proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would permit the government to provide financial aid to parochial schools – a marginal increase in approval since 1980 but a decidedly lower level of support than found in 1974.

Another recent Gallup survey shows support for the voucher system to have slipped somewhat since 1983. Currently 45% favor such a system while 40% are opposed. In the earlier survey 51% said they liked the idea and 38% did not. Under the voucher system the government would provide a certain amount of money for the education of each child, regardless of whether the child attended a public, parochial, or other private secondary school.

Protestants, Catholics Far Apart

As might be expected, Protestants and Catholics are far apart in their views on these two vital issues. Two-thirds of Catholics (67%), but only 38% of Protestants, favor the proposed amendment.

The vote is closer in the case of the voucher system, with 51% of Catholics and 42% of Protestants expressing support for such a measure.

Here is the first question and trend:

Would you favor or oppose an amendment to the Constitution that would permit government financial aid to parochial schools?

Amendment to Permit Aid to Parochial Schools

	Favor	Oppose	No opinion
	%	%	%
1985-August 13–15	45	47	8
1980	40	49	11
1974	52	35	13

Here is the next question and trend:

In some nations, the government allots a certain amount of money for each child for his education. The parents can then send the child to any public, parochial, or private school they choose. This is called the 'voucher system.' Would you like to see such an idea adopted in this country?

Voucher System

	Favor	Oppose	No opinion
	%	%	%
1985-May 17–20	45	40	15
1983	51	38	11
1981	43	41	16
1971	38	44	18
1970	43	46	11

Details of Survey

The results of the proposed constitutional amendment are based on telephone interviews with 1,009 adults, 18 and older, conducted in scientifically selected localities across the nation during the period August 13–15. The results on the voucher system are based on in-person interviews with 1,528 adults, 18 and older, conducted during the period May 17–20. This poll was sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa, the professional educational fraternity.

For results based on samples of these sizes, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be 4% and 3%, respectively, in either direction. In addition to sampling error, the reader should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls. *These statements conform to the standards of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.*

Most Canadians Believe In God But Reject Devil

- While almost 9 in 10 Canadians today hold a belief in God (87%), only about one-third accept the existence of the Devil (33%).
- And while 71% believe in Heaven, far fewer (39%) acknowledge Hell. The lowest level of belief was in reincarnation, with 29% accepting it.
- While belief in God, Heaven and Hell tends to increase with age, there is no difference in acceptance of the Devil among the different age groups, and slightly fewer of those fifty years of age or older acknowledge a belief in reincarnation than do younger Canadians.

The latest results are based on 1,050 personal, in-home interviews with adults, 18 years and over, conducted between July 11 and 13. Samples of this size are accurate within a four percentage point margin, 19 in 20 times.

The question and results are given in the table below.

"WHICH, IF ANY, OF THE FOLLOWING DO YOU BELIEVE IN?"

		AGE		
	NATIONAL	18–29	30–49	50+
Believe in God				
Yes	87%	81%	88%	91%
No	10	17	8	6
Don't Know	3	3	4	4
Believe in Heaven				
Yes	71	66	69	77
No	24	31	23	19
Don't Know	5	3	8	5
Believe in Hell				
Yes	39	36	38	42
No	56	61	56	52
Don't Know	5	4	7	6
Believe in Devil				
Yes	33	32	33	34
No	62	65	61	60
Don't Know	5	3	7	7
Believe in Reincarnation				
Yes	29	31	31	25
No	59	58	58	62
Don't Know	12	12	12	13

NOTE: Percentages may not add exactly to 100, due to rounding.

Sex Education Gaining In Public Acceptance

Greater public acceptance of sex education in the schools comes at a time of an alarming rise in teenage pregnancies and the proliferation of sex-related diseases such as herpes and AIDS.

The 1985 Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa Survey on education shows three adults in four (75%) approving of sex education in the public high schools and 52% favoring such instruction in public elementary schools, in grades 4 through 8.

Both figures represent significant increases since 1981, when 70% and 45% favored sex education in the high schools and elementary schools, respectively.

In addition, a recent survey of teachers in which the same questions were asked showed overwhelming acceptance of sex education at both the high school (86%) and grade school (75%) levels.

The new survey of adults also reveals more liberal attitudes toward the specific subjects that should be covered in sex education classes than were reported in the 1981 survey. Significant increases are found in the proportions favoring teaching birth control, the biology of reproduction, the nature of sexual intercourse, and abortion.

Following are the questions asked and the trends:

Do you feel the public high schools should or should not include sex education in their instructional program?

Do you feel the public elementary schools should or should not include sex education in grades 4 through 8?

Sex Education in Schools

	Favor	Oppose	No opinion
	%	%	%
In High Schools:			
1985	75	19	6
1981	70	22	8
In Elementary Schools:			
1985	52	43	5
1981	45	48	7

Greater acceptance of sex education in the instructional program for high school and elementary school, today as in 1981, is found among younger people, the college-educated, business and professional people, those in the highest income categories, residents of the largest cities, and westerners.

Least approving of sex education are older people, those with less than a high school diploma, and southerners. In the South the public votes *against* sex education for elementary school children by a five to four ratio, 52% to 41%, whereas westerners *favor* the idea by a 62% to 36% margin.

Details are shown in the table:

Favor Sex Education

	In High School	In Elementary School
	%	%
NATIONAL	75	52
Men	74	46
Women	76	57
18–29 years	83	56
30–49 years	81	59
50 & over	62	41
College education	82	63
High school	72	47
Grade school	58	30
East	80	56
Midwest	72	52
South	69	41
West	83	62

Topics to Cover?

When respondents who support the idea of sex education are asked to indicate which topics should be covered, large differences emerge in terms of which are acceptable in high school but not in elementary school.

The one exception is the biology of reproduction, which more than eight in 10 feel should be covered in the elementary schools as well as in the high schools.

In the case of venereal disease and birth control, eight out of 10 feel these subjects should be taught in high schools but only half feel they should be taken up in the elementary schools.

About six in 10 feel that premarital sex, the nature of sexual intercourse, abortion, and homosexuality should be included in the high school curriculum, but only about three out of 10 feel these topics should be covered in elementary school.

FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND YOUR MINISTRY

Building a truly effective ministry requires an awareness of the stages of growth in a person's spiritual life, from childhood to old age, as well as an awareness of the impact of "life crises" on faith development.

Not only an awareness but a *response*, because failure to minister to people at their current stage of faith development – and to respond appropriately to their spiritual "highs" and "lows" – could result in a serious dropout rate in your church or synagogue.

For centuries it has been assumed that faith is something given, constant, unchanging. Now, however, it is clear that people go through "passages" in their spiritual lives, just as they do in other dimensions of their existence. Yet many religious professionals – clergy, counselors, youth leaders, and educators – sometimes appear to be insensitive, in their teaching and program planning, to people's spiritual journeys.

This new publication, FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND YOUR MINISTRY, based on a landmark study four years in the making, will guide you in your efforts to respond to the spiritual changes people experience as they move through life. The study was conducted by The Gallup Organization, Inc. for Faith Development in the Adult Age Cycle, a research project of the Religious Education Association of the United States and Canada in cooperation with the Center for Religious Education, College of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minn.

FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND YOUR MINISTRY not only sheds light on these and other vital questions, but also explores the practical implications of the survey findings for your ministry.

If you preach, write, or teach, we sincerely believe you will find FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND YOUR MINISTRY to be of great help in your work.

HOW TO ORDER

This new publication may be ordered from The Princeton Religion Research Center, Inc. (P.O. Box 310, Princeton, N.J. 08542). The cost is $25 postpaid.

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